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SIPDIS

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FOR SA/PAB, SA/PPD (LSCENSNY, SSTRYKER), SA/RA, INR/R/MR,
AND PASS TO USAID FOR ANE/ASIA/SA/B (WJOHNSON)

CINCPAC FOR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ADVISOR, J51 (MAJ TURNER), J45
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SUBJECT: Media Reaction: Dr. Rice's reported comments on
Bangladesh; Dhaka

Summary: English language daily "New Age" op-ed says that it is quite clear that there was no specific mention of any Indo-US joint initiatives with regard to Bangladesh. Bangladeshi political affiliation is so blinding that one does not even hesitate to condemn the entire nation and rip asunder the country's image if it is convenient to a partisan political agenda.

Dr. Rice's reported comments on Bangladesh

"Motivated Journalism Troubling Bangladesh "
Independent English language daily "New Age" op-ed
(03/29/05) says:

Be it politics or the press, political affiliation is so blinding that one does not even hesitate to condemn the entire nation and rip asunder the country's image alongside that of the government if that is convenient for partisan political agenda.

An example of such journalistic bigotry has been the recent coverage given by a section of our press to the comment on Bangladesh made by the US Secretary of State Dr. Condoleezza Rice during her visit to India on 16 March. I browsed the official websites of the US State Department, the US embassy in New Delhi as well as the relevant Indian and Bangladeshi press sites and found some interesting twists to the whole episode. For example, Bangladesh was mentioned not even once in the US State Department transcript on the joint press conference in New Delhi (16 March) attended by Indian Minister for External Affairs Natwar Singh and US Secretary of State Dr. Rice. The same was true in case of the statements issued by the US embassy in New Delhi. But surprisingly, the Indo-Asian News Service (IANS) circulated a news on 16 March quoting an unnamed senior US embassy official as saying that the US had suggested that the two countries work together in Bangladesh in view of the general deterioration of security in Bangladesh. The official was referring to the spiraling violence and the growing assertiveness by fundamentalist groups in that country, so said the IANS dispatch. Judging from the anonymous nature of the source, it is most likely that the Indian news agency had merely cooked up the story to satisfy certain hostile quarters that find it advantageous to stigmatize the Bangladeshi nation as well as its democratically elected government.

It is quite clear from the foregoing that there was no mention of any Indo-US joint initiative on Bangladesh. But on the basis of the above transcript, the first line of our BDNEWS story published by the leading national dailies was "US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has said, Bangladesh is becoming quite troubling and there is more that the USA and India could do. What a distorted presentation of facts! A section of the Indian and Western press may be justified in forever seeking holes in the social and political fabric of Bangladesh, but it is beyond comprehension why our very own press should go out of the way to put slur on the Bangladeshi nation.

The latest twist in this whole string of anti-Bangladesh propaganda centering on Dr. Rice's visit to India was the UNB (United News of Bangladesh - a private wire service) story published in the national dailies on 22 March. The story says: "There has been no development of specific initiatives on US-Indo cooperation on issues pertaining to Bangladesh, a spokesperson for the US embassy told UNB, responding to a query about what US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had stated in India about the US-India initiatives to deal with the security situation in Bangladesh. If the story had ended there as an admission of earlier reporting errors, that would have earned kudos from the adherents of ethical journalism. But the story continues with another round of vitriolic utterances on the state of affairs in Bangladesh: "The US mission in Dhaka, along with counterparts of other donor organizations, are concerned by the deterioration of governance in Bangladesh - especially by political violence and the law and order

situation. The spokesperson said, "Threats to, and attacks upon the press, the political opposition, cultural institutions, and minority communities are all causes for concern." This is what we call motivated, partisan and unpatriotic journalism.

Chammas